

Prince William Forest Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Prince William Forest Park
Triangle, Virginia



The CCC and Prince William Forest Park



Firefighting crew from CCC Company 2349, 1940 (National Archives).

The CCC: We Can Take It

Between 1929 and 1933, unemployment in the United States jumped from about 3% to more than 25% as the Roaring Twenties crashed into the Great Depression. Among the young, the rate of joblessness was even higher. Soon after taking office in March of 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established a program to reduce unemployment, conserve natural resources, and provide skills to unskilled men: the Civilian Conservation Corps – commonly known as the CCC.

Roosevelt’s Tree Army

From 1933 to 1942, 5% of U.S. men – more than two million – served in the CCC, one of the most popular parts of President Roosevelt’s New Deal. Roosevelt sought to get young men off America’s streets and improve their health and morale while boosting the nation’s economy. CCC “boys,” usually 18 to 25 years old earned \$30 per month and were provided room and board. Of this \$30, they were required to send to their families between \$22 and \$25. Men with supervisory jobs made slightly more money.

CCC enrollees worked on projects in every state

and territory. Creating outdoor recreation areas for public use was a primary goal. CCC enrollees built state parks in such states as West Virginia, Mississippi, and Montana, built dams, and stocked streams with fish. They cut new trails and built campgrounds, and fought fires and built visitor facilities. Camp David, the presidential retreat, was first built by the CCC as a retreat for federal employees. All in all, men worked in 791 CCC camps in 94 national parks and in 881 state or local areas. Two parks near Washington, D.C. – Catocin Mountain Park in Maryland and Prince William Forest Park – are CCC creations.

The Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Area and the CCC

Outdoor recreation: the inheritance of every American, according to National Park Service planners during the 1930s. To make outdoor resources available to inner-city residents, the NPS supervised CCC enrollees who developed Recreational Demonstration Areas (RDAs). Looking for a site near Washington, D.C. to create a sample of an RDA for states and local governments to follow, NPS officials identified 15,000 acres they considered “agriculturally submarginal” about 30 miles south of the capital.

Named for a local creek, the Chopawamsic RDA was quickly abuzz with CCC activity. Hundreds of men from Pennsylvania, Mississippi, and Virginia lived at three different camps within the park. They built the roads in the park and the five rustic cabin camps for use by urban youth groups and welfare agencies. Girl Scouts from Arlington and the Family Service Association of Washington were among the first organizations to use the cabin camps as summer retreats and for nature activities. The CCC built the cabin camps using materials found in the park.

Life in a CCC Camp

Do you get up to the sound of reveille at 6:00 each morning? CCC enrollees rose with the bugle every workday. After dressing and 15 minutes of exercise, they ate breakfast in the camp dining hall. It often included fruit, cereal, pancakes, eggs, ham and coffee. Camps were run by Army officers, and the men made their beds and cleaned their barracks before heading to their worksites at 8:00.

Whether cutting brush, building stone walls, doing trail maintenance, or putting a roof on a camping cabin or visitor center, CCC enrollees worked hard until 4:00. They did break for lunch, which was usually cold sandwiches, pie, and coffee.

Leisure time for sports or other activities was available after work and before supper. Each camp had a well-stocked recreation hall. Enrollees had to change into dress uniforms for the evening meal, held between 5:00 and 5:30. Food was usually plain but filling, with plenty of second helpings available.

Afterwards, enrollees took part in educational or vocational activities. Every camp had an education coordinator to help enrollees improve their literacy or learn job skills they could use after their service. After classes, enrollees could do as they wished in camp. Lights out was usually around 10:00, and soon followed by taps.

The Chopawamsic Lands Before and After the CCC

Prince William Forest Park is not a virgin forest. Instead, it was once home to Native Americans and later to the communities of Joplin and Hickory Ridge and many subsistence farms. Federal officials claimed that local soil was very erodable and poor for agriculture, and condemned the property for use by the Resettlement Administration as an RDA. Construction began in the summer of 1935; the last CCC officials left the RDA in 1943. Nearly 150 families were relocated from their lands. Landowners were paid an average of \$13.33 per acre, but many with only traditional ties to their lands and no deeds received nothing. The occupation of the

park by the Army’s Office of Strategic Services as a training center from 1942 to 1945 worsened the problems of many displaced residents, and some were never paid for their land.

Chopawamsic RDA became a unit of the National Parks system in 1936 and was renamed Prince William Forest Park in 1948. Since its creation, countless groups and individuals have enjoyed the cabin camps built by CCC crews and the many other recreational opportunities offered at the park.

Viewing the Legacy of the CCC

- Places in Prince William Forest Park built by CCC Companies 1374, 2349, and 2383 that you can see today include:
- Buildings at the five Cabin Camps. Each camp was built for 150 campers. Camps 1, 2, 3, and 4 are on the National Register of Historic Places. All camps include cabins, administration buildings, dining halls, infirmaries, craft shops, wash houses, and other buildings built between 1936 and 1940.
 - Dams and lakes on the South Fork of the Quantico Creek and the Quantico Creek.
- Also built by the CCC but no longer visible are:
- Three CCC Camps (Camps SP- 22, SP- 25, and SP- 26/NP- 16). These were the camps where CCC enrollees lived while they built Prince William Forest Park. Most buildings of the CCC camps were removed in 1959.

Where May I Find More Information About the CCC?

Plenty of additional information about the CCC is available. Some books to look for at your local library include:

Cohen, Stan. *The Tree Army: A Pictorial History of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933- 1942* (Missoula: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co.), 1980.

Cole, Olen. *The African- American Experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), 1999.

Hill, Edwin G. *In the Shadow of the Mountain: The Spirit of the CCC* (Pullman, Wash.: Washington State University Press), 1990.

Salmond, John A. *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933- 1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press), 1967

Sellers, Richard West. *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1997.

Watkins, T.H. *The Great Depression: America in the 1930s* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co.), 1993.

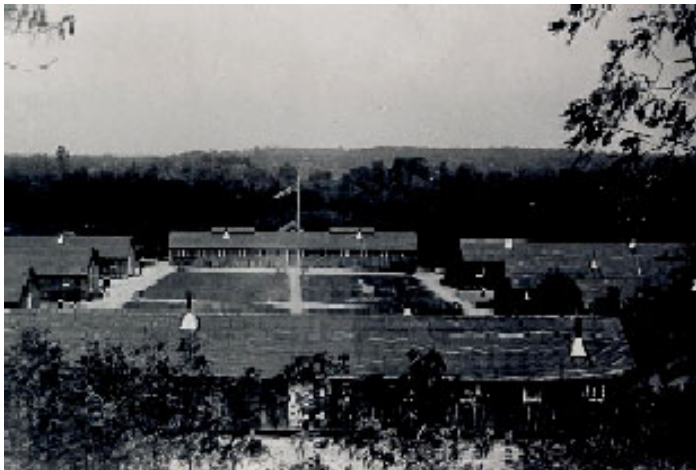
Some websites for research:

Paige, John C. “The Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Park Service, 1933- 1942: An Administrative History.” www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/ccc/index.htm. October 2001. 1985 NPS study.

www.cccalumni.org. October, 2001. The website of the National Association of CCC Alumni.

<http://newdeal.feri.org>. October, 2001. Research and teaching resource devoted to public works and arts projects of the New Deal. Created by the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute.

<http://www.surweb.org/surweb/tour/sjs/sjsample/CC/CCCCHOME/index2.htm>. October, 2001. Examines the effects of CCC enrollees on communities in southern Utah.



Camp SP- 22, CCC Company 1374, 1936
Today this area is the ballfield at Cabin Camp 1 (National Archives).



CCC construction foremen building Cabin Camp 4, 1937 (National Archives).